THE VERBAL ICON

STUDIES IN THE MEANING OF POETRY

BY W. K. WIMSATT, JR., *and two preliminary essays written in collaboration with* MONROE C. BEARDSLEY

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A NOTE ON THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK: The term icon *is used today by semeiotic writers to refer to a verbal sign which* somehow *shares the properties of, or resembles, the objects which it denotes. The same term in its more usual meaning refers to a visual image and especially to one which is a religious symbol. The verbal image which most fully realizes its verbal capacities is that which is not merely a bright picture (in the usual modern meaning of the term* image*) but also an interpretation of reality in its metaphoric and symbolic dimensions. Thus:* The Verbal Icon.

INTRODUCTION

THE ESSAYS which compose this volume were written over a period of about eleven years, from 1941 to 1952. They arose out of several critical preoccupations and occasions, and largely without my planning that they should ever be put together to make a book. They represent, however, what I believe has been my consistent approach to the literary problem at various levels. In the sequence which I now give them, not that of their original publication, and after revisions aimed at the improvement of their relations to one another, I believe the essays approximate a rounded whole.

The volume begins with three negatives. First, two essays which my friend Monroe Beardsley and I wrote to expose as fallacies two very prevalent approaches to the critical object, that by way of its origins in the mind of its maker, and that by way of its results in the mind of its audience. And thirdly, my single-handed objections to a kind of neo-Aristotelianism expounded by a group of critics at Chicago, a critical approach which, as it happens, has some close relations with the "fallacies."

The next four essays attempt to face some of the more substantive responsibilities of the critic who, eschewing the psychologistic kinds of escape, is willing to defend literature as a form of knowledge. What kind of meaning does literature have? How far is this explained by certain concepts, especially the concepts of metaphor and symbol? And what is the relation of literary value to other values involved in verbal structures, especially to moral values?

The next five essays deal with various problems of verbal style, attempting to treat these to some extent by a logic of parallels and oppositions and in general to demonstrate that style is a level of meaning. The proportion of attention given to these matters reflects not any view of mine about the correct center of literary studies but simply one of my chief interests and most frequent lines of access to literary inquiry. The essay entitled "Rhetoric and Poems" includes an introductory section devoted to sorting out several of the main relations which literary scholars develop, often confusedly, between the literary theory and the literary practice of given historical periods.

The concluding group of four essays returns to broader bearings, the relation of literature to other arts and of literary criticism to general aesthetics, the relation of literary meaning (so far as it may be neutrally considered) to literary value and to more general concepts of value and disvalue, the relation of evaluative criticism to historical studies, and the relation of literature not only to morals, as in the fifth essay, but more broadly to the whole complex of the Christian religious tradition.

II

The theory of verbal meaning on which these essays are written might here and there be mistaken for, but is not actually, a form of monistic expressionism. I believe in the integration of literary meaning but at the same time in different kinds and levels of meaning. It is surely true that in a certain sense no two different words or different phrases ever mean fully the same. That is the literary sense. But there are other senses, the

abstractive senses of science, philosophy, practical affairs, and religious dogma, in which different formulations can and do mean the same. The bungled phrase, the slipshod paragraph, the inept metaphor, the irrelevant excursion, the disproportionate development, the feeble conclusion, are indeed all failures of meaning, and the more poetically ambitious the verbal structure in which they occur, the deeper and more substantive the failure may be. In a writing of any complexity, either poetic or philosophic, a confusion of style is likely to be part of a confusion at a more substantive level. On the other hand, stylistic meanings in more prosaic and abstractive structures are almost always capable of being looked on merely as adjuncts to a literal or message meaning. The message can remain the same while changes in the other meanings occur. One improves the style or the organization of a paper written by a student or a friend, but without necessarily making any contribution to his message. The reason such a change may be an improvement, or may be the opposite, lies in the interdependence of levels of meaning. The reason is always a matter of meaning, though it may lie at highly formal and implicit levels. I have refined this distinction as far as I was able in the essay on "Verbal Style" and in particular have tried to show what may be meant by a level of *purely verbal* style.

The interpenetration of abstractly stated meaning and the more concrete, unspecified, and diffusive meaning of metaphors and dramatic structures is much more difficult to define. It involves the deep question of the relation between poetry and philosophy. All the essays in the second group and all those in the last touch on this relation in one way or another. I do not say that I have pushed the inquiry at all conclusively.

The volume is for the most part devoted not to the examination of whole works, but to the pursuit of critical themes. This is a mode which I justify as both interesting in itself to the literary theorist and, like the study of grammar, logic, and prosody, of possible interest to the practical critic. On the other hand, if any practical critic remembers any of my generalizations about figures of speech and the like, very likely he

ought to drop them into the background when he is about his own business. Such fully evaluative expressions as I have here and there used (like the terms "virtue" and "fault" in the essay on "Verbal Style") are to be taken as provisional—applying perhaps to a great many instances—but never as fixed rules of thumb, or headings on a score sheet of evaluation. The kind of relations which I describe in the essays on style should be thought of as tendencies toward, or away from, coherent verbal expression, rather than as specific merits or demerits. My discussion of style is latitudinarian, moving out toward general issues of expression rather than in toward a canonical concept of poetry.

There are such things as general anatomy and general psychology, though we do not always employ them. In presenting a friend or in writing a character sketch, we do not say, "Observe he has a nose and breathes through it; he has a mind and thinks with it." Yet there may be treatises where such observations are in place. Some of the essays in this volume have been written on the assumption that the general anatomy of verbal powers is less widely understood than the most obvious anatomy of the human body.

III

In the first two chapters of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle expounds a scheme for rhetorical studies which, with a certain reversal in emphasis, might serve very well as a paradigm of the complex verbal situation which is taken into account by the literary critic. Aristotle says there are four ways in which an orator can get at his audience: (1) by putting his own character in a good light, (2) by working on the emotions of the audience, (3) by using sound arguments, (4) by using apparently sound arguments. The last way would tend to involve verbal artifice. The first eleven chapters of the third book of the *Rhetoric* are devoted to matters coming broadly under the head of verbal style, the *how* rather than the *what*, as a rhetorical purpose is bound to conceive the distinction. Aristotle conceives verbal

discourse as an act, complicated in itself, and having a personal context of two main dimensions, the speaker and the audience. But he looks on all the features of the verbal act in a pragmatic light—thinking how they will operate to produce an end, a vote by a jury or a senate. That is what rhetoric in the full classical sense means, a pragmatic art of discourse. But there is nothing in the nature of the verbal act to prevent us from looking at the same features not in a pragmatic, but in a dramatic, light, and if we do this we are looking at a given discourse as a literary work.[1]

Despite that aspect of poetic meaning which is commonly referred to as its "universality," a poem is not quite a statement which is viable indifferently between irrelevant persons. There are certain poems (poems of a lover to his mistress, for instance, or poems addressed to Death or to the wild West Wind) in which a particular dramatic listener has a great deal to do with determining a certain kind of style, a certain kind of structure, a certain kind of metaphor. Other poems we may conceive as poems for a sex, a caste, a party. *The Rape of the Lock* is addressed, immediately, to a more squeamish audience than *The Dunciad.* In what is called the "tone" of the poem, even the most universalized audience has to be taken into account. The actual reader of a poem is something like a reader over another reader's shoulder; he reads through the dramatic reader, the person to whom the full tone of the poem is addressed in the fictional situation.[2] This is the truth behind that often quoted statement by J. S. Mill that "Eloquence is *heard,* poetry is *overheard.*" The same dramatic principle applies, of course, and even more pointedly, to the speaker, or speakers, of a poem. The stage drama shows in a complicated way what holds also for the lyric and meditative monologue. The character of the

[1] I use the terms "literature" and "literary" throughout this book in a generic sense, and "poem," "poetry," and "poetic" in a more accented sense, relating to literature in its most intensive instances.

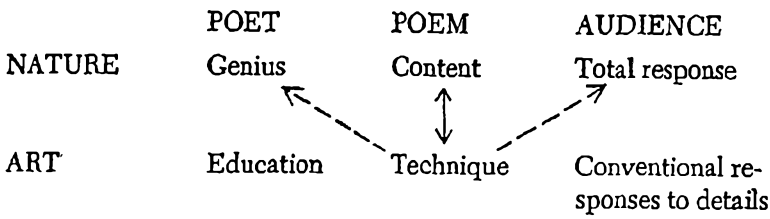
[2] Cp. Rebecca Parker, "Alexander Pope's Use of the Implied Dramatic Speaker," and Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," in *College English,* XI (1949–1950), 137–40, 265–69.

speaker, his thoughts and responses, are reflected in style, structure, metaphor. The fact hardly calls for illustration here. Both speaker and dramatic audience are assimilated into the implicit structure of the poem's meaning. At the fully cognitive level of appreciation we unite in our own minds both speaker and audience. This principle, though it has to remain largely implicit in most rhetorical discussion, is actually that by which the various levels of the poem's meaning are integrated. The means-end situation of style and content becomes, in the dramatic focus, itself a terminal fact of structure.[3] The appreciation of this structure is that total experience or total knowledge of which the critics speak.

One of the alternatives to the dramatic way of literary interpretation is that purely psychological way which is interested in both the speaker and the audience outside the poem (as they are in real life), and which hence leads to the two fallacies, the "intentional" and the "affective," with which this book begins. In the third essay, I partly concur with the Chicago critics in thinking that these fallacies may develop as supposed escapes from more technical kinds of criticism, rules of rhetoric and genre which have hardened into formalist fallacies. I believe that the Chicago critics have correctly imputed such a slantwise maneuver to the ancient critic Longinus and to the general psychological drift of eighteenth century criticism, but that in supposing this was the inevitable path of an escape from the neoclassic genres and rules, they themselves have fallen into similar confusions. Such is in part my argument in the third essay. Here I would suggest a more general principle, that the intentional and affective fallacies have frequently come about through a critic's distaste for problems of technique, and that a sound view of technique and its relation to that aspect of poetry sometimes called "content" will come close to en-

[3] This is not merely a more complicated way of alluding to the "artistry" which in some aesthetic theories even a murder or an embezzlement is said to be capable of displaying. In the literary structure the "means" are limited and characterized by the dignity of the "end."

suring avoidance of the psychological fallacies. For the explication of this view I risk the following table—conscious that in reducing mental relations to spatial I may do less than full justice to the former.



The poem conceived as a thing in between the poet and the audience is of course an abstraction. The poem is an act. The only substantive entities are the poet and the audience. But if we are to lay hold of the poetic act to comprehend and evaluate it, and if it is to pass current as a critical object, it must be hypostatized. The distinction between art and nature is that posited in the classical tradition of criticism and never fully denied in modern times except by forms of expressionistic monism which in effect prohibit critical talk. In order to employ the distinction validly and usefully one need not commit oneself to the notion that art and nature exist separately either in poet, in poem, or in audience. The dotted arrow which points diagonally to the left represents what I should call the Longinian genetic fallacy of double distinction. The critic cries out: "I am not interested in technique for itself; it is either petty precision or exaggerated, even unnatural, figures of speech. The only thing that can justify technique (or palliate its outrages) is the lofty genius, the thoughts and passions of the great poet." Thus the critic, in his hurry to escape from art to nature, at the same time leaves the poem for the poet. There is an ambiguous movement, and no true opposition. In like manner, the dotted arrow pointing to the right represents what I should call the Richardsian affective fallacy of double distinction. The critic cries out: "Don't talk to me about technical features (rhyme or figures) or about parts of poems. They

are justified only as they help to elicit from the audience its total, unique response, which *is* the value of the poem." Again the helter-skelter ambiguity occurs.

In the above table various legitimate distinctions and various connections may be made by persons interested in various studies. Thus a person who was interested, like most of the ancient rhetoricians, in how to go about producing a good orator or poet might very well ponder whether the more important thing is that a candidate be born with genius or that he receive good training—or whether the second is needed at all if the first is present. The drawing up of such a table need not imply that each of the six areas located on it, or each of the possible connections and distinctions, can be managed with equal precision and emphasis. Causal connections, moving from left to right on the table, should perhaps always be double and quadruple. Both the poet's genius and his education contribute to both the content and the technique of his poem. The vertical relations are complementary oppositions. That in the center which I have indicated by the solid and two-pointed arrow (between content and technique) represents the axis and reciprocal motion of all cognitive literary criticism. Though this criticism may be pictured as reaching out to parenthesize the two dimensions of the dramatic speaker (not necessarily the poet) and the dramatic audience, still it moves in a vertical direction, from content to technique and back, constantly trying to see each in the light of the other and to explicate and assert their interdependence, and hence to see the poem as both expression and artifact—and the poet, if one will have him, as both sayer and maker.

1

He owns with toil he wrote the following scenes;
But, if they're naught, ne'er spare him for his pains:
Damn him the more; have no commiseration
For dullness on mature deliberation.

—WILLIAM CONGREVE, Prologue to
The Way of the World

THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY

THE CLAIM of the author's "intention" upon the critic's judgment has been challenged in a number of recent discussions, notably in the debate entitled *The Personal Heresy,* between Professors Lewis and Tillyard. But it seems doubtful if this claim and most of its romantic corollaries are as yet subject to any widespread questioning. The present writers, in a short article entitled "Intention" for a *Dictionary*[1] of literary criticism, raised the issue but were unable to pursue its implications at any length. We argued that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle which accepted or rejected points to the polar opposites of classical "imitation" and romantic expression. It entails many specific truths about inspiration, authenticity, biography, literary history and scholarship, and about some trends of contemporary poetry, especially its allusiveness. There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic's approach will not be qualified by his view of "intention."

"Intention," as we shall use the term, corresponds to *what he intended* in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance. "In order to judge the poet's performance, we must know *what he intended.*" Intention is design or plan in the author's mind. Intention has obvious affinities for the author's attitude toward his work, the way he felt, what made him write.

We begin our discussion with a series of propositions summarized and abstracted to a degree where they seem to us axiomatic.

1. A poem does not come into existence by accident. The words of a poem, as Professor Stoll has remarked, come out of a head, not out of a hat. Yet to insist on the designing intellect as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a *standard* by which the critic is to judge the worth of the poet's performance.

2. One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. "Only one *caveat* must be borne in mind," says an eminent intentionalist[2] in a moment when his theory repudiates itself; "the poet's aim must be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself."

3. Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. (One demands that it work.) It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer. ("A poem should not mean but be.") A poem can *be* only through its *meaning*—since its medium is words—yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once. Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrevelant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and "bugs" from machinery.

In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention. They are more abstract than poetry.

4. The meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical object like an apple. But even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized). We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker*, and if to the author at all, only by an act of biographical inference.

5. There is a sense in which an author, by revision, may better achieve his original intention. But it is a very abstract sense. He intended to write a better work, or a better work of a certain kind, and now has done it. But it follows that his former concrete intention was not his intention. "He's the man we were in search of, that's true," says Hardy's rustic constable, "and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted."

"Is not a critic," asks Professor Stoll, "a judge, who does not explore his own consciousness, but determines the author's meaning or intention, as if the poem were a will, a contract, or the constitution? The poem is not the critic's own." He has accurately diagnosed two forms of irresponsibility, one of which he prefers. Our view is yet different. The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology.

A critic of our *Dictionary* article, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, has argued[3] that there are two kinds of inquiry about a work of art: (1) whether the artist achieved his intentions; (2) whether the work of art "ought ever to have been undertaken

at all" and so "whether it is worth preserving." Number (2), Coomaraswamy maintains, is not "criticism of any work of art *qua* work of art," but is rather moral criticism; number (1) is artistic criticism. But we maintain that (2) need not be moral criticism: that there is another way of deciding whether works of art are worth preserving and whether, in a sense, they "ought" to have been undertaken, and this is the way of objective criticism of works of art as such, the way which enables us to distinguish between a skillful murder and a skillful poem. A skillful murder is an example which Coomaraswamy uses, and in his system the difference between the murder and the poem is simply a "moral" one, not an "artistic" one, since each if carried out according to plan is "artistically" successful. We maintain that (2) is an inquiry of more worth than (1), and since (2) and not (1) is capable of distinguishing poetry from murder, the name "artistic criticism" is properly given to (2).

II

It is not so much a historical statement as a definition to say that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one. When a rhetorician of the first century A.D. writes: "Sublimity is the echo of a great soul," or when he tells us that "Homer enters into the sublime actions of his heroes" and "shares the full inspiration of the combat," we shall not be surprised to find this rhetorician considered as a distant harbinger of romanticism and greeted in the warmest terms by Saintsbury. One may wish to argue whether Longinus should be called romantic, but there can hardly be a doubt that in one important way he is.

Goethe's three questions for "constructive criticism" are "What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?" If one leaves out the middle question, one has in effect the system of Croce—the culmination and crowning philosophic expression of romanticism. The beautiful is the successful intuition-expression, and the ugly is the unsuccessful; the intuition or private part of art is *the* aesthetic fact, and the medium or public part is not the subject of aesthetic at all.

The Madonna of Cimabue is still in the Church of Santa Maria Novella; but does she speak to the visitor of to-day as to the Florentines of the thirteenth century?

Historical interpretation labours . . . to reintegrate in us the psychological conditions which have changed in the course of history. It . . . enables us to see a work of art (a physical object) as its *author saw it* in the moment of production.[4]

The first italics are Croce's, the second ours. The upshot of Croce's system is an ambiguous emphasis on history. With such passages as a point of departure a critic may write a nice analysis of the meaning or "spirit" of a play by Shakespeare or Corneille—a process that involves close historical study but remains aesthetic criticism—or he may, with equal plausibility, produce an essay in sociology, biography, or other kinds of non-aesthetic history.

III

I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts. . . . I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them. . . . Will you believe me? . . . there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration.

That reiterated mistrust of the poets which we hear from Socrates may have been part of a rigorously ascetic view in which we hardly wish to participate, yet Plato's Socrates saw a truth about the poetic mind which the world no longer commonly sees—so much criticism, and that the most inspirational and most affectionately remembered, has proceeded from the poets themselves.

Certainly the poets have had something to say that the critic and professor could not say; their message has been more exciting: that poetry should come as naturally as leaves to a tree, that poetry is the lava of the imagination, or that it is emotion recollected in tranquillity. But it is necessary that we realize the character and authority of such testimony. There

is only a fine shade of difference between such expressions and a kind of earnest advice that authors often give. Thus Edward Young, Carlyle, Walter Pater:

I know two golden rules from *ethics,* which are no less golden in *Composition,* than in life. 1. *Know thyself;* 2dly, *Reverence thyself.*

This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. Horace's rule, *Si vis me flere,* is applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed.

Truth! there can be no merit, no craft at all, without that. And further, all beauty is in the long run only *fineness* of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within.

And Housman's little handbook to the poetic mind yields this illustration:

Having drunk a pint of beer at luncheon—beer is a sedative to the brain, and my afternoons are the least intellectual portion of my life—I would go out for a walk of two or three hours. As I went along, thinking of nothing in particular, only looking at things around me and following the progress of the seasons, there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once.

This is the logical terminus of the series already quoted. Here is a confession of how poems were written which would do as a definition of poetry just as well as "emotion recollected in tranquillity"—and which the young poet might equally well take to heart as a practical rule. Drink a pint of beer, relax, go walking, think on nothing in particular, look at things, surrender yourself to yourself, search for the truth in your own soul, listen to the sound of your own inside voice, discover and express the *vraie vérité.*

It is probably true that all this is excellent advice for poets. The young imagination fired by Wordsworth and Carlyle is probably closer to the verge of producing a poem than the mind

of the student who has been sobered by Aristotle or Richards. The art of inspiring poets, or at least of inciting something like poetry in young persons, has probably gone further in our day than ever before. Books of creative writing such as those issued from the Lincoln School are interesting evidence of what a child can do.[5] All this, however, would appear to belong to an art separate from criticism—to a psychological discipline, a system of self-development, a yoga, which the young poet perhaps does well to notice, but which is something different from the public art of evaluating poems.

Coleridge and Arnold were better critics than most poets have been, and if the critical tendency dried up the poetry in Arnold and perhaps in Coleridge, it is not inconsistent with our argument, which is that judgment of poems is different from the art of producing them. Coleridge has given us the classic "anodyne" story, and tells what he can about the genesis of a poem which he calls a "psychological curiosity," but his definitions of poetry and of the poetic quality "imagination" are to be found elsewhere and in quite other terms.

It would be convenient if the passwords of the intentional school, "sincerity," "fidelity," "spontaneity," "authenticity," "genuineness," "originality," could be equated with terms such as "integrity," "relevance," "unity," "function," "maturity," "subtlety," "adequacy," and other more precise terms of evaluation —in short, if "expression" always meant aesthetic achievement. But this is not so.

"Aesthetic" art, says Professor Curt Ducasse, an ingenious theorist of expression, is the conscious objectification of feelings, in which an intrinsic part is the critical moment. The artist corrects the objectification when it is not adequate. But this may mean that the earlier attempt was not successful in objectifying the self, or "it may also mean that it was a successful objectification of a self which, when it confronted us clearly, we disowned and repudiated in favor of another."[6] What is the standard by which we disown or accept the self? Professor Ducasse does not say. Whatever it may be, however, this standard is an element in the definition of art which will not

reduce to terms of objectification. The evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author.

IV

There is criticism of poetry and there is author psychology, which when applied to the present or future takes the form of inspirational promotion; but author psychology can be historical too, and then we have literary biography, a legitimate and attractive study in itself, one approach, as Professor Tillyard would argue, to personality, the poem being only a parallel approach. Certainly it need not be with a derogatory purpose that one points out personal studies, as distinct from poetic studies, in the realm of literary scholarship. Yet there is danger of confusing personal and poetic studies; and there is the fault of writing the personal as if it were poetic.

There is a difference between internal and external evidence for the meaning of a poem. And the paradox is only verbal and superficial that what is (1) internal is also public: it is discovered through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture; while what is (2) external is private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact: it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem—to what lady, while sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother. There is (3) an intermediate kind of evidence about the character of the author or about private or semiprivate meanings attached to words or topics by an author or by a coterie of which he is a member. The meaning of words is the history of words, and the biography of an author, his use of a word, and the associations which the word had for *him*, are part of the word's history and meaning.[7] But the three types of evidence, especially (2) and (3), shade into one another so subtly that it is not always easy to draw a line between ex-

amples, and hence arises the difficulty for criticism. The use of biographical evidence need not involve intentionalism, because while it may be evidence of what the author intended, it may also be evidence of the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance. On the other hand, it may not be all this. And a critic who is concerned with evidence of type (1) and moderately with that of type (3) will in the long run produce a different sort of comment from that of the critic who is concerned with (2) and with (3) where it shades into (2).

The whole glittering parade of Professor Lowes' *Road to Xanadu,* for instance, runs along the border between types (2) and (3) or boldly traverses the romantic region of (2). " 'Kubla Khan,' " says Professor Lowes, "is the fabric of a vision, but every image that rose up in its weaving had passed that way before. And it would seem that there is nothing haphazard or fortuitous in their return." This is not quite clear—not even when Professor Lowes explains that there were clusters of associations, like hooked atoms, which were drawn into complex relation with other clusters in the deep well of Coleridge's memory, and which then coalesced and issued forth as poems. If there was nothing "haphazard or fortuitous" in the way the images returned to the surface, that may mean (1) that Coleridge could not produce what he did not have, that he was limited in his creation by what he had read or otherwise experienced, or (2) that having received certain clusters of associations, he was bound to return them in just the way he did, and that the value of the poem may be described in terms of the experiences on which he had to draw. The latter pair of propositions (a sort of Hartleyan associationism which Coleridge himself repudiated in the *Biographia*) may not be assented to. There were certainly other combinations, other poems, worse or better, that might have been written by men who had read Bartram and Purchas and Bruce and Milton. And this will be true no matter how many times we are able to add to the brilliant complex of Coleridge's reading. In certain flourishes (such as the sentence we have quoted) and in chapter headings like "The Shaping Spirit," "The Magical Synthesis," "Imagina-

tion Creatrix," it may be that Professor Lowes pretends to say more about the actual poems than he does. There is a certain deceptive variation in these fancy chapter titles; one expects to pass on to a new stage in the argument, and one finds—more and more sources, more and more about "the streamy nature of association."[8]

"Wohin der Weg?" quotes Professor Lowes for the motto of his book. "Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene." Precisely because the way is *unbetreten,* we should say, it leads away from the poem. Bartram's *Travels* contains a good deal of the history of certain words and of certain romantic Floridian conceptions that appear in "Kubla Khan." And a good deal of that history has passed and was then passing into the very stuff of our language. Perhaps a person who has read Bartram appreciates the poem more than one who has not. Or, by looking up the vocabulary of "Kubla Khan" in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* or by reading some of the other books there quoted, a person may know the poem better. But it would seem to pertain little to the poem to know that *Coleridge* had read Bartram. There is a gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem, but can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem. For all the objects of our manifold experience, for every unity, there is an action of the mind which cuts off roots, melts away context—or indeed we should never have objects or ideas or anything to talk about.

It is probable that there is nothing in Professor Lowes' vast book which could detract from anyone's appreciation of either *The Ancient Mariner* or "Kubla Khan." We next present a case where preoccupation with evidence of type (3) has gone so far as to distort a critic's view of a poem (yet a case not so obvious as those that abound in our critical journals).

In a well known poem by John Donne appears this quatrain:

> Moving of th' earth brings harmes and feares,
> Men reckon what it did and meant,
> But trepidation of the spheares,
> Though greater farre, is innocent.

A recent critic in an elaborate treatment of Donne's learning has written of this quatrain as follows:

> He touches the emotional pulse of the situation by a skillful allusion to the new and the old astronomy. . . . Of the new astronomy, the "moving of the earth" is the most radical principle; of the old, the "trepidation of the spheres" is the motion of the greatest complexity. . . . The poet must exhort his love to quietness and calm upon his departure; and for this purpose the figure based upon the latter motion (trepidation), long absorbed into the traditional astronomy, fittingly suggests the tension of the moment without arousing the "harmes and feares" implicit in the figure of the moving earth [9]

The argument is plausible and rests on a well substantiated thesis that Donne was deeply interested in the new astronomy and its repercussions in the theological realm. In various works Donne shows his familiarity with Kepler's *De Stella Nova,* with Galileo's *Siderius Nuncius,* with William Gilbert's *De Magnete,* and with Clavius' commentary on the *De Sphaera* of Sacrobosco. He refers to the new science in his Sermon at Paul's Cross and in a letter to Sir Henry Goodyer. In *The First Anniversary* he says the "new philosophy calls all in doubt." In the *Elegy on Prince Henry* he says that the "least moving of the center" makes "the world to shake."

It is difficult to answer argument like this, and impossible to answer it with evidence of like nature. There is no reason why Donne might not have written a stanza in which the two kinds of celestial motion stood for two sorts of emotion at parting. And if we become full of astronomical ideas and see Donne only against the background of the new science, we may believe that he did. But the text itself remains to be dealt with, the analyzable vehicle of a complicated metaphor. And one may observe: (1) that the movement of the earth according to the Copernican theory is a celestial motion, smooth and regular, and while it might cause religious or philosophic fears, it could not be associated with the crudity and earthiness of the kind of commotion which the speaker in the poem wishes to discourage; (2) that there is another moving of the earth, an earthquake, which has just these qualities and is to be associated

with the tear-floods and sigh-tempests of the second stanza of the poem; (3) that "trepidation" is an appropriate opposite of earthquake, because each is a shaking or vibratory motion; and "trepidation of the spheres" is "greater far" than an earthquake, but not much greater (if two such motions can be compared as to greatness) than the annual motion of the earth; (4) that reckoning what it "did and meant" shows that the event has passed, like an earthquake, not like the incessant celestial movement of the earth. Perhaps a knowledge of Donne's interest in the new science may add another shade of meaning, an overtone to the stanza in question, though to say even this runs against the words. To make the geocentric and heliocentric antithesis the core of the metaphor is to disregard the English language, to prefer private evidence to public, external to internal.

V

If the distinction between kinds of evidence has implications for the historical critic, it has them no less for the contemporary poet and his critic. Or, since every rule for a poet is but another side of a judgment by a critic, and since the past is the realm of the scholar and critic, and the future and present that of the poet and the critical leaders of taste, we may say that the problems arising in literary scholarship from the intentional fallacy are matched by others which arise in the world of progressive experiment.

The question of "allusiveness," for example, as acutely posed by the poetry of Eliot, is certainly one where a false judgment is likely to involve the intentional fallacy. The frequency and depth of literary allusion in the poetry of Eliot and others has driven so many in pursuit of full meanings to the *Golden Bough* and the Elizabethan drama that it has become a kind of commonplace to suppose that we do not know what a poet means unless we have traced him in his reading—a supposition redolent with intentional implications. The stand taken by F. O. Matthiessen is a sound one and partially forestalls the difficulty.

If one reads these lines with an attentive ear and is sensitive to their sudden shifts in movement, the contrast between the actual Thames and the idealized vision of it during an age before it flowed through a megalopolis is sharply conveyed by that movement itself, whether or not one recognizes the refrain to be from Spenser.

Eliot's allusions work when we know them—and to a great extent even when we do not know them, through their suggestive power.

But sometimes we find allusions supported by notes, and it is a nice question whether the notes function more as guides to send us where we may be educated, or more as indications in themselves about the character of the allusions. "Nearly everything of importance . . . that is apposite to an appreciation of 'The Waste Land,'" writes Matthiessen of Miss Weston's book, "has been incorporated into the structure of the poem itself, or into Eliot's Notes." And with such an admission it may begin to appear that it would not much matter if Eliot invented his sources (as Sir Walter Scott invented chapter epigraphs from "old plays" and "anonymous" authors, or as Coleridge wrote marginal glosses for *The Ancient Mariner*). Allusions to Dante, Webster, Marvell, or Baudelaire doubtless gain something because these writers existed, but it is doubtful whether the same can be said for an allusion to an obscure Elizabethan:

> The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
> Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.

"Cf. Day, *Parliament of Bees:*" says Eliot,

> When of a sudden, listening, you shall hear,
> A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
> Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
> Where all shall see her naked skin.

The irony is completed by the quotation itself; had Eliot, as is quite conceivable, composed these lines to furnish his own background, there would be no loss of validity. The conviction may grow as one reads Eliot's next note: "I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was

reported to me from Sydney, Australia." The important word in this note—on Mrs. Porter and her daughter who washed their feet in soda water—is "ballad." And if one should feel from the lines themselves their "ballad" quality, there would be little need for the note. Ultimately, the inquiry must focus on the integrity of such notes as parts of the poem, for where they constitute special information about the meaning of phrases in the poem, they ought to be subject to the same scrutiny as any of the other words in which it is written. Matthiessen believes the notes were the price Eliot "had to pay in order to avoid what he would have considered muffling the energy of his poem by extended connecting links in the text itself." But it may be questioned whether the notes and the need for them are not equally muffling. F. W. Bateson has plausibly argued that Tennyson's "The Sailor Boy" would be better if half the stanzas were omitted, and the best versions of ballads like "Sir Patrick Spens" owe their power to the very audacity with which the minstrel has taken for granted the story upon which he comments. What then if a poet finds he cannot take so much for granted in a more recondite context and rather than write informatively, supplies notes? It can be said in favor of this plan that at least the notes do not pretend to be dramatic, as they would if written in verse. On the other hand, the notes may look like unassimilated material lying loose beside the poem, necessary for the meaning of the verbal symbol, but not integrated, so that the symbol stands incomplete.

We mean to suggest by the above analysis that whereas notes tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author's *intention*, yet they ought to be judged like any other parts of a composition (verbal arrangement special to a particular context), and when so judged their reality as parts of the poem, or their imaginative integration with the rest of the poem, may come into question. Mathiessen, for instance, sees that Eliot's titles for poems and his epigraphs are informative apparatus, like the notes. But while he is worried by some of the notes and thinks that Eliot "appears to be mocking himself for writing the note at the same time that he wants to convey

something by it," Matthiessen believes that the "device" of epigraphs "is not at all open to the objection of not being sufficiently structural." "The *intention*," he says, "is to enable the poet to secure a condensed expression in the poem itself." "In each case the epigraph is *designed* to form an integral part of the effect of the poem." And Eliot himself, in his notes, has justified his poetic practice in terms of intention.

> The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. . . . The man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself.

And perhaps he is to be taken more seriously here, when off guard in a note, than when in his Norton Lectures he comments on the difficulty of saying what a poem means and adds playfully that he thinks of prefixing to a second edition of *Ash Wednesday* some lines from *Don Juan:*

> I don't pretend that I quite understand
> My own meaning when I would be *very* fine;
> But the fact is that I have nothing planned
> Unless it were to be a moment merry.

If Eliot and other contemporary poets have any characteristic fault, it may be in *planning* too much.

Allusiveness in poetry is one of several critical issues by which we have illustrated the more abstract issue of intentionalism, but it may be for today the most important illustration. As a poetic practice allusiveness would appear to be in some recent poems an extreme corollary of the romantic intentionalist assumption, and as a critical issue it challenges and brings to light in a special way the basic premise of intentionalism. The following instance from the poetry of Eliot may serve to epitomize the practical implications of what we have been saying. In Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," toward the end, occurs the line: "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each," and this bears a certain resemblance to a line in a Song

by John Donne, "Teach me to heare Mermaides singing," so that for the reader acquainted to a certain degree with Donne's poetry, the critical question arises: Is Eliot's line an allusion to Donne's? Is Prufrock thinking about Donne? Is Eliot thinking about Donne? We suggest that there are two radically different ways of looking for an answer to this question. There is (1) the way of poetic analysis and exegesis, which inquires whether it makes any sense if Eliot-Prufrock *is* thinking about Donne. In an earlier part of the poem, when Prufrock asks, "Would it have been worth while, . . . To have squeezed the universe into a ball," his words take half their sadness and irony from certain energetic and passionate lines of Marvel "To His Coy Mistress." But the exegetical inquirer may wonder whether mermaids considered as "strange sights" (to hear them is in Donne's poem analogous to getting with child a mandrake root) have much to do with Prufrock's mermaids, which seem to be symbols of romance and dynamism, and which incidentally have literary authentication, if they need it, in a line of a sonnet by Gérard de Nerval. This method of inquiry may lead to the conclusion that the given resemblance between Eliot and Donne is without significance and is better not thought of, or the method may have the disadvantage of providing no certain conclusion. Nevertheless, we submit that this is the true and objective way of criticism, as contrasted to what the very uncertainty of exegesis might tempt a second kind of critic to undertake: (2) the way of biographical or genetic inquiry, in which, taking advantage of the fact that Eliot is still alive, and in the spirit of a man who would settle a bet, the critic writes to Eliot and asks what he meant, or if he had Donne in mind. We shall not here weigh the probabilities—whether Eliot would answer that he meant nothing at all, had nothing at all in mind —a sufficiently good answer to such a question—or in an unguarded moment might furnish a clear and, within its limit, irrefutable answer. Our point is that such an answer to such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem "Prufrock"; it would not be a critical inquiry. Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.